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UNCLAS PARAMARIBO 000183

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR WHA/CAR - MSEIBEL, HAITI MONITORING TASK FORCE

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: SURINAMESE MINISTER OF DEFENSE DISAVOWS PRESS
REPORTS OF GOS WILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT HAITIAN REFUGEES

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PLEASE HANDLE ACCORDINGLY.

1. (U) SURINAMESE DEFENSE/ACTING FOREIGN MINISTER RONALD ASSEN DISAVOWED TO THE EMBASSY A HEADLINE STORY IN THE FEBRUARY 25 EDITION OF THE LOCAL DAILY DE WARE TIJD, IN WHICH HE REPORTEDLY DECLARED SURINAME'S WILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT HAITIAN REFUGEES IF THE SITUATION IN HAITI DETERIORATES. CONTRARY TO WHAT WAS REPORTED IN THE PRESS, ASSEN TOLD THE EMBASSY THAT HE HAD ONLY EXPRESSED SURINAME'S WILLINGNESS TO CONSIDER A REQUEST BY THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO ACCEPT HAITIAN REFUGEES. (NOTE. IN 1996, SURINAME PARTICIPATED IN THE US-LED OPERATION DISTANT HAVEN AND MADE RUDIMENTARY PREPARATIONS FOR A MAKESHIFT CAMP NEXT TO THE AYOKO MILITARY COMPOUND, LOCATED NEAR THE INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, FOR AN INFLUX OF HAITIAN REFUGEES, WHICH NEVER MATERIALIZED. TODAY THE "REFUGEE CAMP" AMOUNTS TO A GRASSY FIELD WITH CONCRETE SLABS, WHICH LACKS THE NECESSARY INFRASTRUCTURE TO SUPPORT A REFUGEE POPULATION. END NOTE.)

2. (SBU) COMMENT. THE MISINTERPRETATION BY THE PRESS OF MINISTER ASSEN'S STATEMENTS CONCERNING SURINAME'S WILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT HAITIAN REFUGEES IS YET ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF THE TOOLS OF THE TRADE EMPLOYED BY SURINAME'S UNDERDEVELOPED PRESS. THE STATEMENT BY ASSEN THAT SURINAME WOULD CONSIDER ANY REQUEST BY THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO TAKE IN HAITIAN REFUGEES IS A FAR CRY FROM THE ASSERTION THAT SURINAME IS WILLING TO ACCEPT REFUGEES. ASSEN AND OTHER GOS OFFICIALS CAN LIMIT SUCH PRESS GAFFES BY SPEAKING LESS FREELY WITH THE PRESS. END COMMENT.

3. (U) MINIMIZE CONSIDERED.

BARNES

NNNN

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